

# Living with Brain Injury



## Nebraska Annual State Plan 2023-2024

January 2023



This project is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$600,536.00 with 100 percent funding by ACL/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

## Contents

Introduction	2
About Brain Injury	3
How the Plan is Developed	3
An Invitation	3
Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council and Staff	4
Annual Living with Brain Injury State Plan for 2023-2024	5
Access Services	5
Build the Voice	7
Connect to Resources	8
Shape Policy	10
Increase Public Awareness	11

## Introduction

Welcome to Nebraska's *Annual Living with Brain Injury State Plan for 2023-2024* developed by the Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (Nebraska VR) and the statewide Brain Injury Advisory Council (BIAC). The *Plan* is intended as a guide to improve the state's system of services and supports for people with brain injury and their families.

Nebraska VR serves as the lead state agency for brain injury, providing the required state match and full-time staff to administer the state's federal Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) grant from the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Grant funds are used for projects aimed at closing the gap of unmet and insufficiently met needs of Nebraskans of all ages who are impacted by brain injury, and to support the work of the BIAC.

The BIAC acts as the forum for all brain injury stakeholders in the state to collectively identify unmet needs and service gaps, and to recommend policy- and service system-based solutions. Its members include individuals and family members directly impacted by brain injury, medical providers, service organizations, state agency representatives and advocates. The BIAC's mission is to "engage, integrate and inspire brain injury stakeholders to help achieve the *Statewide Vision for Brain Injury Policies and Services*." The *Vision* was created in 2017 by over 225 individuals with brain injury and their family members. It inspires a better future, and better outcomes for Nebraskans impacted by this oftentimes devastating injury.

The *Statewide Vision for Brain Injury Policies and Services* states that, in the next 5-7 years, the future of brain injury in Nebraska will have evolved such that the following statements will accurately characterize the realm of brain injury:

- Nebraskans with a brain injury, regardless of geographic location or financial means, will have access to the necessary resources that they require to pursue their recovery journey.
- The Voice of people with a brain injury and their family members will exist as a unified Voice of solidarity and advocacy, and will be engaged to shape policies and programs.
- All stakeholders in the brain injury realm will understand their unique role as well as how they complement each other towards making the future of brain injury better; subsequently, people with a brain injury will have an easier time navigating available resources with the help of specialized assistance from Peer Support Resource Navigators.
- The Nebraska Legislature will be informed about the nature of brain injury and its ongoing impact on Nebraskans, and will be supportive of funding and policies to support the necessary statewide resources for those with brain injury.
- The complex nature of an injured brain and the recovery journey will be understood by everyone, such that stigma will be eliminated and the public will be more supportive of efforts to improve overall brain injury support and resources.

The goals and objectives described in the *Plan* represent tangible steps toward achieving this *Vision*. Nebraska VR and the BIAC do not expect to take these steps alone, but seek instead to actively engage *all* brain injury stakeholders in improving the state's system of services and supports for people with brain injury and their families.

## About Brain Injury

Depending on the cause, a brain injury is considered traumatic or non-traumatic. A traumatic injury can be caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head, or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Non-traumatic injuries can be caused by stroke, lack of oxygen to the brain, drug overdose, illness or infection. Even a mild brain injury can result in permanent cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioral changes that impact daily function. Individuals who experience more moderate to severe injuries may require life-long services and supports for housing, work and community living. Each year, over 10,000 Nebraskans of all ages are diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries. Countless more are injured, yet are not diagnosed or treated. The number of non-traumatic injuries that occur each year is unknown. Many who are injured, especially those living in rural areas, have limited or no access to the services and supports they need to recover, return to school or work, or to live as independently as possible. People with brain injury and their families are often unaware of existing services and supports in their areas and how to access them.

## How The *Plan* is Developed

Members of the BIAC review data collected in the *Annual Living with Brain Injury Needs Survey* and other sources to identify the most urgent and prevalent unmet and insufficiently met needs of people with brain injury and their families to address in the *Annual Living with Brain Injury State Plan*. Nebraska VR and the BIAC also gather input each year from participants of the Annual Living with An Injured Brain Summit and local support groups. Specific strategies were added to target the needs of children, youth, adults and older Nebraskans with TBI, and to incorporate priority goals and activities of ACL's federal TBI program. The *Plan* is posted to the BIAC website, and is periodically disseminated for public comment via electronic mailing lists and social media.

## An Invitation

As stated previously, the *Plan* is intended as a guide to improve the state's system of services and supports for people with brain injury and their families. There are countless dedicated advocates, professionals, agencies and organizations across the state doing incredible work to help people reclaim their lives after brain injury. The *Plan* is an invitation for us all to share accountability for the same vision; to become engaged, integrated and inspired brain injury stakeholders.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines a stakeholder as "one who is involved in or affected by a course of action." If your life or the life of someone you know or care for is affected by brain injury, then you are a brain injury stakeholder, and your input is vital. To become involved in BIAC activities, contact Nebraska VR and the BIAC by email at [vr.infobiac@nebraska.gov](mailto:vr.infobiac@nebraska.gov) or by phone at (308) 224-7571. You can learn more about us at our websites:

Nebraska VR: <http://www.vr.nebraska.gov>

Brain Injury Advisory Council: <https://braininjury.nebraska.gov>

## **Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council**

Tiffany Armstrong, Council Vice-Chair, Gretna

Shari Bahensky, Hotline for Disabilities Services/Client Assistance Program, Lincoln

Emaly Ball, Kearney

Penny Clark, Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Lincoln

Ashley Davis, Kearney

Tania Diaz, Disability Rights Nebraska, Lincoln

TinaMaria Fernandez, HOPE-Esperanza, North Platte

Cindy Hoffschneider, Blair

Karen Houseman, Department of Health & Human Services, AD and TBI Waiver Service Coordination, Lincoln

Sarvinoz Kadyrova, Kearney

Carla Lasley, Nebraska VR, Lincoln

Amy Levering, LaVista

Brooke Murtaugh, Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, Lincoln

Judy Nichelson, Council Chair, North Platte

Peg Ogea-Ginsburg, Department of Health and Human Services, Injury Prevention, Lincoln

Zoe Olson, Lincoln

Darsha Pelland, Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education, Lincoln

Michelle Ploeger, Quality Living, Inc., Omaha

Peggy Reisher, Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska, Lincoln

Tamara Snider, Goodwill Industries of Greater Nebraska, Inc., Kearney

Dennis Thompson, North Platte

Shawna Thompson, North Platte

## **Staff**

Keri Bennett, Nebraska VR, Kearney

Tresa Christensen, Nebraska VR, Kearney

Nancy Noha, Assistive Technology Partnership, Lincoln

## Annual Living with Brain Injury State Plan for 2023-2024

### Access Services

Nebraskans with a brain injury, regardless of geographic location or financial means, will have access to the necessary resources that they require to pursue their recovery.

<p>Goal 1: Improvements to Nebraska's system of care and community-based services for people with brain injury will be driven by the collection and analysis of meaningful data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Revise the Annual <i>Living with Brain Injury</i> Needs Survey and the survey process with input from people with brain injury, family members, the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska (BIA-NE) and other stakeholders, to increase participation.</li><li>• Advocate for amendments to the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Registry follow-up statute to allow for multiple contacts with individuals placed on the Registry, and other improvements to connect them with appropriate services for their recovery, using data from the BIA-NE's Resource Facilitation program and other sources.</li><li>• Create and implement a plan to systematically collect meaningful data and statistics on Nebraskans impacted by brain injury, including data on the long-term outcomes of people with brain injury and data related specific age groups (children, youth, adults, older adults).</li><li>• Conduct annual assessments to collect relevant data on unmet and insufficiently met needs of unserved and underserved populations, service gaps and barriers, including measurements of end-user satisfaction with the TBI service system.</li><li>• Examine 2020 Nebraska Census data to help identify culturally and linguistically diverse groups for outreach and inclusion in needs assessments.</li><li>• Augment Nebraska's set of data collection and surveillance strategies to accurately determine the state's prevalence of TBI and to ensure equitable participation in needs assessments that inform continuous TBI service system improvement. (FY 2021-2026 TBI Grant Objective)</li><li>• Assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nebraskans with TBI, including 1) the health impacts of COVID-19 on individuals with TBI, 2) positive and negative impacts of the pandemic on individuals with TBI and their family members and caregivers, 3) COVID-19 long-haul symptoms, and 4) the pandemic's impact on access to rehabilitation and community-based services for Nebraskans with TBI. Data will be used to develop strategies to mitigate and overcome the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. (FY 2021-2026 ACL Priority Goal)</li></ul>
--	--

<p>Goal 2: Paid caregivers and professionals in medicine and healthcare, education, behavioral health, law enforcement, vocational rehabilitation, and other disciplines will receive information, training, and education to understand and address the physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral needs of people with brain injury.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize professional groups for training and education, and develop training curriculum in collaboration with the BIA-NE, utilizing Annual <i>Living with Brain Injury</i> Needs Survey results.</li> <li>• Improve competency levels among Nebraska VR staff to effectively serve and support individuals with TBI aged 16 and over who are seeking employment. (FY 2021-2026 TBI Grant Objective)</li> <li>• Increase the availability of high-quality supported employment services and service providers for individuals with TBI who are seeking employment. (FY 2021-2026 TBI Grant Objective)</li> <li>• Review and revise existing resources, and develop new resources and training curricula related to specific age groups (children, youth, adults, older adults).</li> <li>• Develop educational materials on how to identify and care for older adults with TBI including materials for health care professionals to differentiate between TBI and dementia.</li> <li>• Develop training and resources specific to skilled nursing facility (SNF), Long-Term Care (LTC) and Home Health provider staff on TBI and behavioral health issues.</li> </ul>
<p>Goal 3: People with brain injury and their family members will access affordable housing, and home and community-based service options in all parts of the state.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate to amend the current TBI Waiver level of care and services.</li> <li>• Advocate to provide Independence Skills Training services to people with brain injury served under the Aged and Disabled Waiver.</li> <li>• Advocate in the development and implementation of Nebraska's Olmstead Plan.</li> <li>• Use nursing home and assisted living cost data to advocate for more supports to keep individuals with TBI out of institutions and support them in their homes and communities.</li> <li>• Partner with the Falls Prevention Coalition to support fall prevention efforts, prevent TBI and keep older adults in their own homes.</li> <li>• Advocate for neurobehavioral treatment and residential options for individuals with TBI.</li> </ul>
<p>Goal 4: People with brain injury and their family members will be made aware of the dangers of Opioid medication misuse, and know where to seek assistance and treatment of substance abuse concerns. (HHS-wide Public Health Goal)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A BIAC Committee will consult with state Opioid experts and resources and develop action steps for an education plan.</li> <li>• Educate medical providers regarding the dangers of Opioid and other medications that are not appropriate for individuals with TBI.</li> </ul>
<p>Goal 5: People with brain injury and co-occurring serious mental illness will receive effective treatment and community-based services to meet their needs. (HHS-wide Public Health Goal)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A BIAC Committee will consult with Behavioral Health experts, the BIA-NE, and people with brain injury and co-occurring serious mental illness to develop action steps for the provision of effective treatment and services.</li> </ul>

## Build the Voice

**The Voice of people with a brain injury and their family members will exist as a unified Voice of solidarity and advocacy, and will be engaged to shape policies and programs.**

<p>Goal 1: People with brain injury and their family members will have the leadership capacity and resources to effectively advocate for policy, program and service improvements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build the foundation for a statewide, voice-driven association of people with brain injury and their family members by providing leadership and capacity-building coaching.</li><li>• Equip the association to advocate for policy, program and service changes by making data, resources, tools and strategies accessible to its leaders and members.</li><li>• Engage association members in shaping policies, programs and services by providing education in advocacy strategies and offering opportunities to advocate, such as an Annual <i>Living with Brain Injury</i> Summit.</li><li>• The association, Nebraska VR, the BIAC and the BIA-NE of Nebraska will define complementary roles to foster a unified front for brain injury, and to avoid competition and duplication of effort.</li><li>• Connect with the Nebraska Title V Maternal and Child Block Grant program to provide advocacy training for parents of children with TBI.</li></ul>
<p>Goal 2: The Brain Injury Advisory Council will be engaged and fully representative of the statewide population of people with brain injury.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop onboarding, orientation, and mentoring materials to ensure new members are able to fully participate in BIAC activities.</li><li>• Add new members with brain injury representing each region of the state to reach 50% of the total BIAC membership.</li><li>• Partner with trusted group members or champions to help craft and deliver messaging to recruit Nebraskans of culturally and linguistically diverse groups to fill positions on the BIAC.</li><li>• Recruit members to ensure representation of all age groups (children, youth, adults, older adults) on the BIAC.</li></ul>

### Connect to Resources

All stakeholders in the brain injury realm will understand their unique role as well as how they complement each other in helping Nebraskans with brain injury live full and productive lives; subsequently, people with a brain injury will have an easier time navigating available resources with specialized assistance from Peer Support and Resource Facilitation Programs.

Goal 1: People of all ages who have experienced brain injury will be connected to resources in their region of the state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In the TBI Registry follow-up mailing, include customized brochures for recipients in three age groups and three regions to connect them to resources closer to their home.</li><li>• Translate the TBI Registry follow-up brochures into additional languages and formats for use in reaching out to culturally and linguistically diverse groups.</li><li>• Disseminate customized brochures via the Aging and Disability Resource Centers and other agencies and organizations to ensure outreach to older persons and individuals with disabilities is achieved.</li><li>• Collaborate with the BIA-NE's Resource Facilitators to ensure individuals with brain injury of all ages in each region of the state are connected to available resources.</li><li>• Increase the capacity of the statewide TBI Registry in order to provide more individuals with recent TBIs with information on resources and services via the TBI Registry follow-up mailings. (FY 2021-2026 TBI Grant Objective)</li><li>• Pilot strategies to determine the effectiveness of contacting TBI Registry letter recipients a second time, or for remaining connected with them after their first contact.</li><li>• Enhance the Resource Facilitation program's capacity to serve individuals with persistent symptoms from TBI with the integration of a high-quality, surveillance-based long-term care service delivery model. (FY 2021-2026 TBI Grant Objective)</li></ul>
Goal 2: People with brain injury have access to trained Peer Support mentors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define the Peer Support mentor role to complement existing brain injury programs and supports such as the BIA-NE's Resource Facilitation program to maximize collaboration and minimize duplication of effort.</li><li>• Implement a Peer Support demonstration pilot using evidence-based Peer to Peer Support practices (such as those from the Centers for Medicare &amp; Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The demonstration pilot will prioritize underserved, rural areas of the state.</li><li>• Increase the availability of evidence-based Peer to Peer Supports for individuals with TBI and their families. (FY 2021-2026 TBI Grant Objective)</li></ul>

<p>Goal 3: Nebraska’s statewide capacity to provide comprehensive and coordinated services to people with brain injury and their families will be enhanced through active participation in federal brain injury grant and technical assistance programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nebraska VR will co-lead federal grantee workgroups on “Transition and Employment”, and “Using Data to Connect People to Services” topics, and will share workgroup products with the BIAC and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Nebraska VR will participate in the development of national Brain Injury Workforce Competencies with other Mentor grantee states.</li> </ul>
--	---

### Shape Policy

**The Nebraska Legislature will be informed about the nature of brain injury and its ongoing impact on Nebraskans, and will be supportive of funding and policies to support the necessary statewide resources for those with brain injury.**

Goal 1: The Annual Brain Injury State Plan will reflect the Voice-Generated Statewide Vision, and will serve as a structured approach to communicate the needs of Nebraskans with brain injury and their families to the Legislature and other stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Obtain public input on the draft Annual Brain Injury State Plan.</li><li>• Share the Annual Brain Injury State Plan with the new Brain Injury Trust Fund Oversight Committee.</li><li>• Implement the Annual Brain Injury State Plan with measurable outcomes.</li></ul>
Goal 2: Nebraska VR will serve as the state's lead agency, providing administrative leadership for the Brain Injury Advisory Council, and collaborating with brain injury stakeholders and other state agencies to build and sustain a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated system of brain injury services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nebraska VR will provide state match funds and full time staff for the federal TBI grant application and administration.</li><li>• Nebraska VR will provide frequent updates on BIAC and TBI grant activities to the Nebraska Department of Education Commissioner who will serve on the Brain Injury Trust Fund Oversight Committee.</li><li>• Attach voluntary letters of commitment from BIAC member agencies and organizations describing how they will support and advance the Annual Brain Injury State Plan activities.</li></ul>
Goal 3: The Brain Injury Advisory Council's messaging and advocacy plans will be fully implemented based on meaningful data that drives ongoing voice-driven advocacy efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The BIAC will research barriers to the provision of community-based services and draft recommendations to share with the appropriate agencies at opportune times.</li><li>• The BIAC will review Annual <i>Living with Brain Injury</i> Needs Survey and other data to recommend BIAC advocacy and public policy priorities on an annual basis.</li><li>• Review the Annual Brain Injury State Plan and progress on goals during each quarterly BIAC meeting.</li></ul>

### Increase Public Awareness

**The complex nature of an injured brain and the recovery journey will be understood by all Nebraskans, such that stigma will be decreased and the public will be more supportive of efforts to improve overall brain injury support and resources.**

Goal 1: Ensure that families receive information, education and support to address their financial, social and emotional needs associated with caring for someone with brain injury.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prioritize information and education topics and supports, and plan action steps utilizing Annual <i>Living with Brain Injury</i> Needs Survey results and input from Annual <i>Living with Brain Injury</i> Summit attendees.</li><li>• Connect with churches, faith-based organizations and community centers to reach families who are impacted by TBI, especially those in rural areas.</li><li>• Connect with state and local caregiver networks and other organizations to reach families impacted by TBI with information and education.</li><li>• Locate and access funding for public service announcements (PSAs) or find radio and TV stations who will air free PSAs.</li></ul>
Goal 2: The Brain Injury Advisory Council will be seen as a credible, statewide leader, and the forum for all brain injury stakeholders to pursue the Voice-Generated Statewide Vision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Launch public awareness activities to increase BIAC visibility, strengthen connections with other disability organizations and increase outreach to brain injury stakeholders across the state (to include social media and BIAC website enhancements).</li><li>• Identify supplemental revenue for BIAC sustainability in the event federal TBI grant funds are not available.</li><li>• BIAC committees will be established, functioning, active and providing directions.</li></ul>

To comment on the *Annual Living with Brain Injury State Plan for 2023-2024* contact Nebraska VR and the BIAC by email at [vr.infobiac@nebraska.gov](mailto:vr.infobiac@nebraska.gov) or by writing to us at Nebraska VR/BIAC, 315 W 60<sup>th</sup> Street, Ste 400, Kearney, NE 68845.

To request this document in an alternative format, please contact Tresa Christensen, [tresa.christensen@nebraska.gov](mailto:tresa.christensen@nebraska.gov) or (308) 440-8000.



Nebraska VR, Nebraska Department of Education  
Address: P.O. Box 94987, Lincoln, NE 68509  
Telephone: (402) 471-3644 or Toll Free (877) 637-3422